

**SOUTH CAROLINA WELCOME CENTER PROGRAM'S  
BROCHURE INVENTORY PROCESS  
IMPROVEMENT STUDY**

**Cheryl Ann Lewis Harwell**

**South Carolina Parks, Recreation, & Tourism**

**Welcome Center Program**

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**STATE DOCUMENTS**

## INTRODUCTION

This project will begin the search for ways to improve the South Carolina Welcome Center inventory process. Each South Carolina Welcome Center conducts an inventory of all tourism-related brochures received and issued by staff during the year. Since it's inception in 1968, the South Carolina Parks, Recreation & Tourism's (SCPRT) Welcome Center Program has served more than 87 million travelers. The South Carolina Welcome Center Program offers free accommodation and attraction reservation services for travelers and our industry partners. Last fiscal year, accommodation reservations made through the Welcome Centers resulted in 53,274 room nights, representing over \$3.7 million worth of direct room revenue for South Carolina lodging properties (based on a \$70 average daily rate).

In the process of marketing the state to 2.4 million visitors, nearly 7 million brochures, representing the South Carolina tourism industry, were distributed through the Welcome Centers in 2003. Data on these brochures, along with the economic impact data, are gathered by hand from daily, monthly, and annual inventories and the subsequent statistics are used for the SCPRT's annual Accountability Report. The statistics also serve as indicators of South Carolina Welcome Centers' tourism efforts for our tourism industry partners. These statistics would not be available if South Carolina Welcome Center staff did not conduct annual inventories. The following issues will be addressed in this search for process improvement: ascertain the cost vs. the benefit of doing the annual brochure inventory; ascertain what the actual process is—get the process in writing with a flow chart and sample forms; and ensure, if found to be beneficial, the process is being done in the most efficient way possible.

Although appearing to be well warranted, the current brochure inventory process is extremely time consuming, and takes many man hours to accomplish. Doing the inventory also takes away valuable time from the welcome centers' mission of providing frontline service to travelers coming through the welcome centers. In addition, the benefit of doing the related work required by the inventory process is not as easily measured as the obvious value of the welcome centers' economic impact figures. Certainly, brochure inventories do not show as clear a financial return for the investment of time it takes to complete the process.

Finally, the brochure inventory process is not done the same way across the Program, nor is it documented as to how the actual inventory is to be accomplished. This lack of documentation is a concern due to the imminent retirement of several long-term welcome center managers. This lack of written information could prove to be a major training issue in the near future. Collected information from the sample Welcome Centers, reviewed for effectiveness, will allow for a collection of the "best of the best" practices to create a brochure "inventory reference guide" for new South Carolina Welcome Center managers' to use in the accomplishment of their respective Welcome Center's annual brochure inventory.

## **REVIEW INFORMATION RESOURCES**

Three of the nine state welcome centers, Fort Mill at Interstate 77, Hardeeville at Interstate 95, and North Augusta at Interstate 20, will be asked to compile the steps each take to accomplish their respective year-end inventory. In addition, samples of related inventory forms will be collected from each of the three welcome centers covered. Also,

an e-mail survey will be sent to other state's welcome center managers to gather information on their state's respective brochure inventory processes. Planned as well are interviews of a local PigglyWiggly grocery store, an interview with an employee of Thomas & Howard, a restaurant product service, and also a visit to South Carolina's Surplus & Supply warehouse for an interview to gather information on how each of these retail businesses handle their respective inventories.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The welcome center managers of the three sample welcome centers will be surveyed and the current related worksheets will be collected from each as well. This material will be reviewed and a flow chart will be developed to illustrate what, if any, common processes the three welcome centers follow. A list will also be prepared regarding the work processes being done differently. In addition, the three managers will be asked to provide the amount of time required by their staff to accomplish the annual brochure inventory at each of three welcome centers. From this information, and using current salary information, a cost analysis will be done and the benefit of this investment will be considered in relation to SCPRT's Accountability Report figure. The relative benefit of using these statistics as an indicator of the Agency's efforts to promote our tourism industry partners will also be considered.

Also, an e-mailed survey will be sent to other state's welcome center managers through SCPRT's connection with the Tourism Industry Association (TIA). This will be done to gather information on how and what other states collect brochure data on by asking the question, "How are you doing the end-of-year brochure inventory at your

respective state's welcome center?" and "What information do you feel is important to collect?" This information will also benchmark what other state's consider important regarding statistical data collection of brochures.

Finally, on-site visits and telephone interviews will be done with local retail businesses and with the South Carolina Service & Supply warehouse to gather information on how their respective inventories are handled. Even though these entities do not inventory brochures, data is collected on products coming in and out of their businesses, just as brochures come in and out of the welcome centers. In that way, this related information could provide insight and new perspective as to how the South Carolina Welcome Center Program might improve the current brochure inventory process. An overview of these findings will be given and discussed.

## **RESULTS**

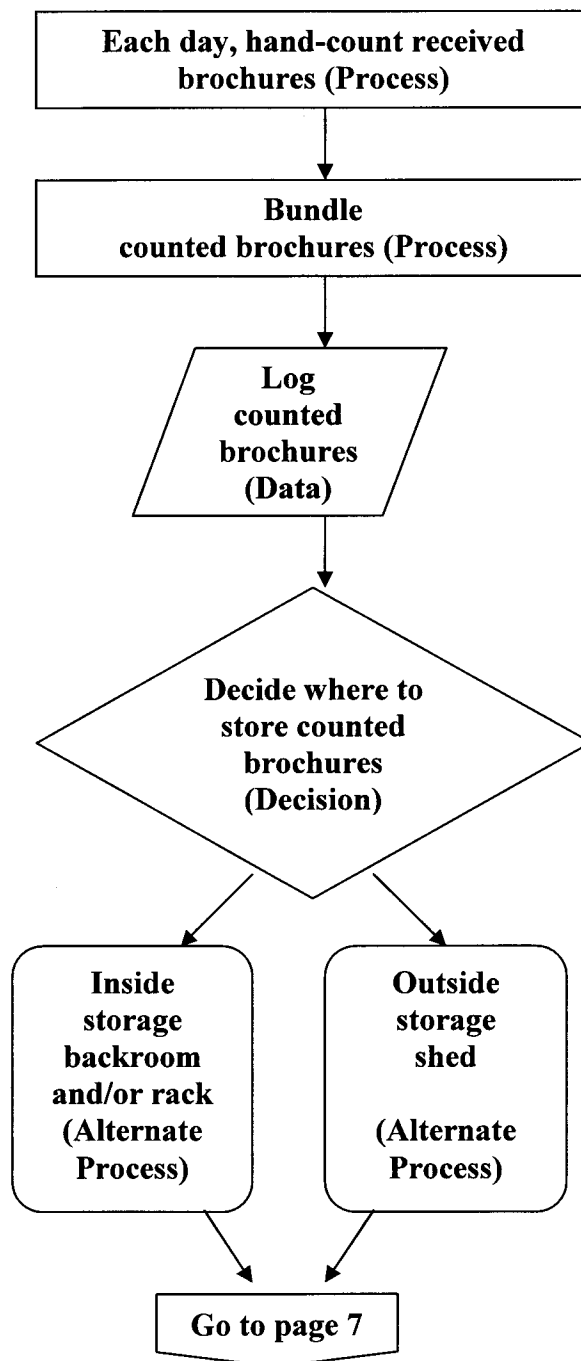
The inventory process was evaluated to ascertain its benefit toward the SCPRT mission and will be put in writing to facilitate future welcome center manager training. The first step was to poll the three welcome center managers to establish how much time is taken in accomplishing the annual brochure inventory. These three welcome center managers advised they and their staff spent from 250-300 hours over a period of four to five weeks to collect, double-check, reconcile, and enter annual brochure inventory data. In figuring cost vs. benefit of doing the annual brochure inventory, several steps were taken:

- The total daily salary for all nine welcome centers is \$3,755 (the welcome centers' annual salaries were totaled and divided by 260 work days per year).

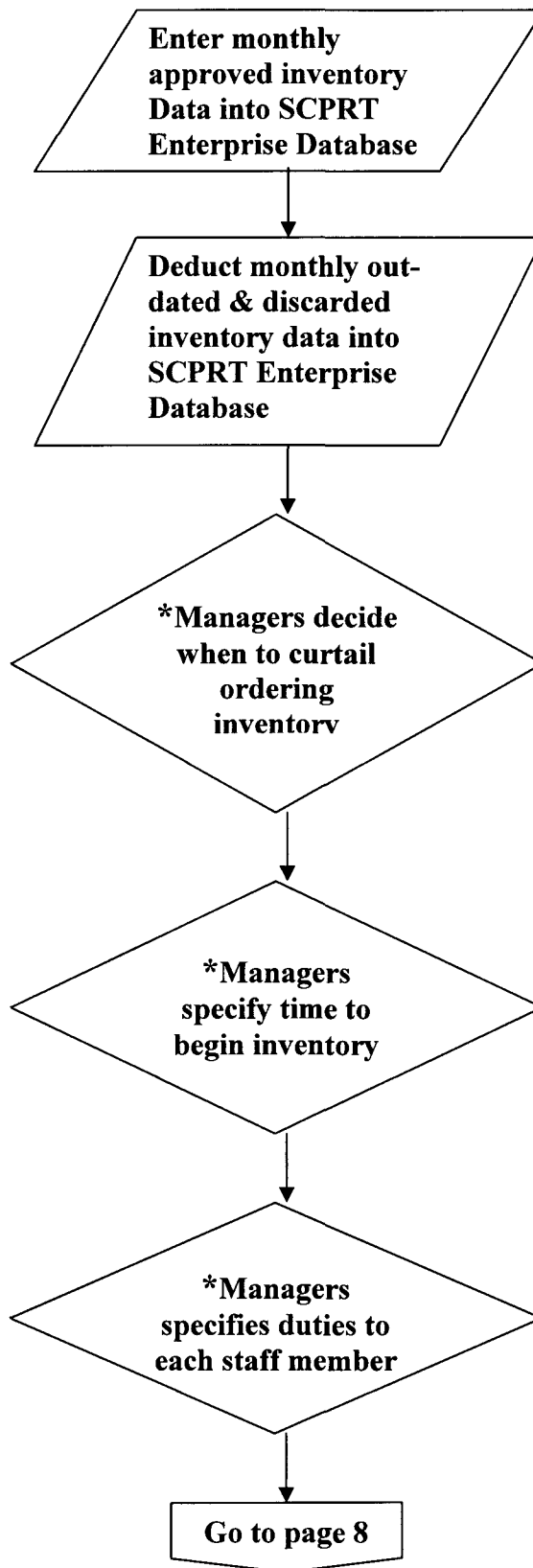
- Dividing the total daily salary of \$3,755 by 40 employees, the average salary comes to \$94 per day, or when divided by an 8-hour work day, \$12 per hour per employee.
- Multiplying this \$12 hourly per employee rate by the 275 hours (i.e., mean of 250-300 hours given by the three sample welcome center managers), it takes to complete the brochure inventory process, an overall annual brochure inventory average cost rate of \$3,300 is derived.

Also, the following flow chart illustrates the work process followed by the three sample welcome centers. Notably, all three centers sampled are following the same process. The only differences seen (see asterisked flow chart items, page 7) stem from the actual decision-making areas of the process. These differences are: when each manager chooses to curtail brochure ordering; when each manager decides to begin the inventory; and when each manager decides what responsibilities are assigned to the respective staff. Decision-making differences stem from each welcome center having different peak traffic seasons (e.g., fall leaf season, Northern United States senior citizens and Canadian tourism influx, regional golf tournaments), and differences in each welcome center's respective staffing configurations (e.g., one welcome center has six full-time employees, another has only four). Therefore, a reasonable flexibility as to when and who participates in the annual inventory process is understandable and even encouraged to ensure the Program's standard of excellent customer service is maintained during the inventory. Further, each center's worksheet sample shows, even though welcome center's forms differ, they are all gathering the same data field information required by the SCPRT Enterprise Database. A sampling of the three center's worksheets is included in Appendices A-C.

**FLOW CHART**  
**ANNUAL BROCHURE INVENTORY PROCESS**  
**CURRENTLY IN ALL THREE SURVEYED WELCOME CENTERS**

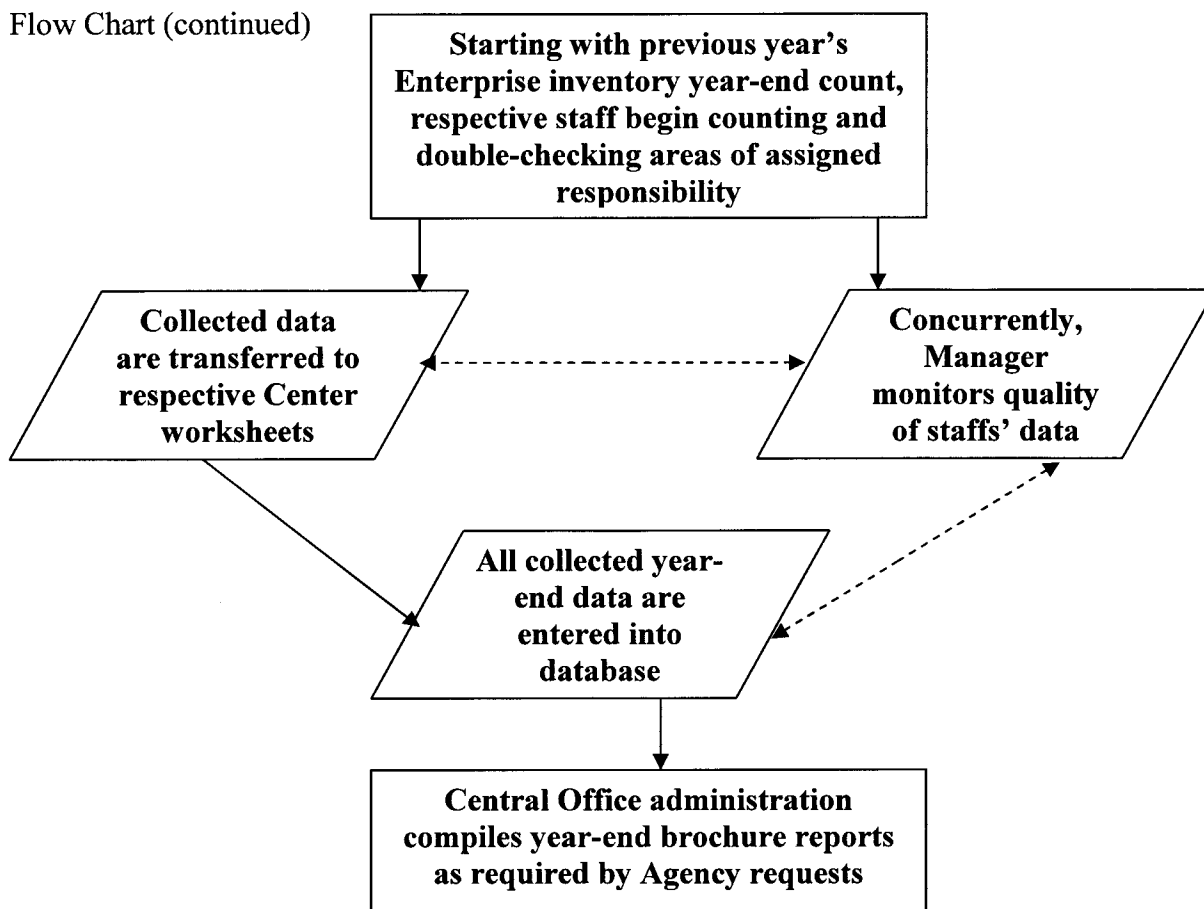


Flow Chart (continued)





Flow Chart (continued)



(January 2005)

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Once the welcome center information was collected and evaluated, survey questions, "How are you conducting the end-of-year brochure inventory at your respective state's welcome centers?" and "What information do you feel is important to collect?", were e-mailed to other state tourism offices: Six states responded: three states, Virginia, Iowa, and Oregon, now charge industry partners to place brochures in the welcome center racks; the other three advised they were only tracking state government-produced brochures (e.g., travel guides and maps), and were not tracking inventory on any of their tourism industry partners' brochures.

With the welcome center and other states' information collected, three retail managers were interviewed to gather information on how their respective inventories were handled. First, a local PigglyWiggly grocery store Co-Manager, Randy Lee, was interviewed. Mr. Lee advised their inventory included the hand-labeling of boxes when stored and the manual count of shelf items. He also stated PigglyWiggly uses an independent company to audit store inventory. In addition, Mr. Lee advised the UPC bar codes on PigglyWiggly store products were used mainly for accounting purposes and were not generally used for inventory purposes. Another interview was conducted with Thomas & Howard's Information Technology Manager, Chris Davenport, who advised his company manually inventories its stock as well. This restaurant food service manually counts the refrigerated and frozen stock in ascertaining their current inventories. A third visit was made to South Carolina's Service & Supply warehouse, where Manager Shirley Wessinger, was interviewed. Ms. Wessinger advised materials coming from other state agencies were accompanied by a "Turn In Document" (TID) and a code number was assigned to each TID. The TID number and a description of the merchandise is then entered into a Service & Supply database. When the item was sold or disposed of, a Bill of Sale was issued. This database was developed specifically for Service & Supply through an independent, outside contractor.

### **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

The average cost of inventory per brochure distributed is \$3,300. This projected cost of conducting the annual brochure inventory is minimal when compared with the benefits of having the statistics available. These statistics are also useful as an indicator of the

welcome centers' efforts on the behalf of our tourism industry partners who place their brochures in welcome center racks. Further, being able to say the South Carolina Welcome Centers distribute almost 7 million brochures annually is a program-enhancing number (along with our visitation and economic impact statistics) to use in illustrating the effectiveness of the Welcome Center Program's marketing efforts, and in turn, justifying the program's continued operation in these days of state budget scrutiny.

However, as demand increases on the Program to expand its volume of brochures, SCPRT may want to re-evaluate what type of brochures should actually be inventoried. As other state tourism offices have advised, they are only keeping statistics on the distribution of state-produced travel guides, maps, and state parks material. Further, as orders for brochures go directly to the tourism industry partner, each of these entities is aware of how many brochures the welcome centers distribute for them. Therefore, doing an annual inventory for this purpose alone would duplicate information already held by these partners. In relation to this, a recommendation to the Agency to have the Welcome Centers only collect statistics on state-provided travel guides, brochures, state and national park material, and state maps may be made for future consideration.

Only receiving six state responses to the e-mailed survey question was disappointing. Even so, learning of the possibility of increasing revenue through the sales of rack space was timely and an interesting option as this is currently a *free* service provided to South Carolina tourism industry partners.

Finally, the retail business interviews revealed the welcome center program's current manual brochure inventory practices are not alone. These large retail businesses routinely receive product and conduct inventories just as the welcome centers routinely receive brochures and conduct inventories. Both the welcome centers and these retail businesses manually count and use computers to compile inventory reports. Also, these businesses use databases, just as the welcome centers use the SCPRT Enterprise Database to compile data and make statistical reports.

In conclusion, the following actions are planned:

- SCPRT administrators will continue evaluating the inventory process.
- Guidelines to the inventory process will be developed for use by future welcome center managers.
- Other state's tourism managers will be interviewed in the effort to improve the South Carolina Welcome Centers brochure inventory process, as well as how they have initiated the selling of welcome center rack space.
- Welcome Center managers will interview retail businesses in a search for insight and new perspective on finding more efficient inventory processes.

To maintain the best practices of this nationally recognized program, South Carolina Welcome Center managers will continue the efforts begun by this project. Imperative to its continued success, with unlimited sources of information and at minimal cost, the South Carolina Welcome Center Program will continue to review and evaluate its administrative and operational practices in the accomplishment of the SCPRT mission, goals, and objectives.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Davenport, Chris. Personal interview, Thomas & Howard, Newberry, SC.  
January 16, 2005.

Lee, Ron. Personal interview, PigglyWiggly Grocery, Highway 1, West  
Columbia, SC. January 4, 2005.

Wessinger, Shirley. Personal interview, State Services & Supply, Airport Blvd.,  
West Columbia, SC. January 18, 2005.

## **APPENDICES**

Hardeeville WC, 10-2004

# Lowcountry/Resort Islands - AC

YEAR =	Brochures received - Current year	+	Last year's year- end inventory (# counted last year)	-	This year's year- end inventory (# just counted)	+	Inventory Discards	=	Total BROCHURES DISTRIBUTED in current year
Accommodations									
Attractions Recreation									
Chamber/ CVB									
Events/ Festivals									
General/Other									
SCATR Regional									
Dining/Shopping									

Yearly Inventory Formula Sheet - Created 10/2004

APPENDIX A  
SAMPLE Hardeeville Inventory Worksheet

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>APPENDIX B</b> <b>SAMPLE North Augusta Inventory Worksheet</b></p>
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**2002 Literature Totals**

**LOWCOUNTRY**

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- |    |                    |       |       |
|----|--------------------|-------|-------|
| 1) | Accommodations     | _____ | _____ |
| 2) | Attractions        | _____ | _____ |
| 3) | Events/Festivals   | _____ | _____ |
| 4) | Rest/Dine/Shopping | _____ | _____ |
| 5) | Reg. Visitor Guide | _____ | _____ |
| 6) | Chamber/CVB        | _____ | _____ |
| 7) | Gen/Other          | _____ | _____ |



## APPENDIX C

### SAMPLE Fort Mill Inventory Worksheet

[illegible]